Colonial Industrial Training vs. Democratic Web Education: The Experts vs. the People?

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Abstract

This vision and opinion paper is based on the principles of the Global Learning Framework™. For years, the contrast of traditional e-learning's top-down approach has clashed with the vast wave of collaborative learning that takes place every second and everywhere on the global Internet. Understanding the sharp contrast of academic dictatorial colonial learning management system (LMS) architecture with the public's collaborative "search learning" practices of everyday Web learning helps us recognize the issues that e-learning silos created and then drives us into a new collaborative world.

1. Introduction

Colonial or industrial training is a one-way street training method for the learner on how to behave in order to fit into an organization. Whether it is military training or business processes, it is a one-way, trickle down, industrial approach. It assumes that the elite know what has to be done and the worker bee student must obey to pass or keep a job. Driven by the powers of industrial workforce management, we have built learning management system (LMS) systems as machines for one-way authoritarian instruction. Industrial learning methods are expensive time consuming, filled with standards, restrictions and ironically out of sync with how we actually learn everyday in the real world and on the Web. *In colonial learning, we actually hoard knowledge, protecting it as intellectual property or SCORM standards. This contrasts sharply with the Web that gives knowledge away. WebMD is global, free education.*

Democratic learning ("search learning," Web-based learning) is common people using the Internet to solve problems, discovering solutions, collaborating with students, and publishing results. All of this goes on while reshaping the knowledge base of the entire planet dynamically and in real-time. It is free, fast, liberating, massively scalable, and unstoppable. *In democratic Web education, it is the free flow of the creative talent of the globe currently running through over 300,000 education Web sites that are ever growing, beyond the control of any LMS or industry standard.*

2. The Revolt against Colonial Taxation

Back in 1998, the U.S. e-learning market was getting ready to explode. Venture capital funding was pouring in because of large margins that the e-learning business models promised. I wrote some of those plans. While being in the thick of all of this strategic consulting with vendors and speaking and writing, a number of us began to have deep concerns that we may be heading down the wrong path. Perhaps our business models were forcing us into a clash with public behavior, K-12, NGOs, and developing countries. My fears were realized, because today we are living with highly restrictive methods, systems, and business practices. At the same time, a free bypass global education on the socially networked Internet is scaling at an incomprehensible rate.

Revolution was in the air; public Web education passed e-learning by. YouTube and PDFs became standards that dwarfed the LMSs and SCORMs. How could the industrial elite have missed it?

Perhaps we have fooled ourselves into believing that delivering something globally meant trickle down e-learning. It does not. This kind of *global e-learning is only a one way, trickle down strategy*. Real global e-learning is when the world is empowered to collaboratively teach itself. Then we will really have global learning. When we see Africa's educators make their own lessons using collaborate content, we can honestly claim global learning has arrived (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Kenya Rift Valley School Children

3. Colonial-Industrial Training vs. Democratic Bypass Learning Models

Here are the issues we are still debating:

- E-learning's business model is based on an expensive hosting infrastructure, methods, development tools, and licensing that creates the high overhead. We need a free, or near-free, learning model.

- Global education cannot scale if the learning content is stored inside a single organization (even in a cloud). It seems that no one organization (or portal) can build a training system large enough to contain the global knowledge employees need in order to do their jobs.
- Courses were developed by teams of developers with complicated development tools. The Web taught us that users can produce more quality content and at a faster rate. The Web taught us that HTML tools are out and collaborative widgets are in. Furthermore, many LMSs denied the existence of Learning Communities. It is the LMS versus Slideshare, SCRIBD, YouTube, and Google Tools. The Web won long ago.
- For providing safe and simple education, the LMS would work adequately for the single organization, *because all of the knowledge needed for workforce competence and job processes are self contained in that organization.* Unfortunately, village life, cultures, and ecosystems are not in a corporate bubble.
- The LMS was used for "courses" and job "compliance-certifications" and not small bits of on-demand knowledge that might be in a Knowledge Management Systems or on a Web search. Even if it was called on-demand learning, the truth is it is just a catalogue of sequenced courses (i.e. online textbooks).
- Just building e-learning courses is a myopic view of how individuals learn in an organization. I coined the phrase "Search Learning" in the 1998 eLearning Conference so show that we learn by searching for small, relevant chunks of information and not for whole courses. Indexing was defeated by relational search.
- We claimed that hierarchical, authoritarian e-learning worked, yet we had a 50% failure rate. Learning should not be trickled down by some expert. We know education works well when it is collaborative with other people; e-learning courses ignored much of that. Ironically, the students can collaboratively teach a superior course together. For too long e-learning ignored constructivism.
- The economics of e-learning was too expensive for marketing applications or small non-profit communities to use. Distance learning should be for the global learning communities and not just for well-funded NGOs and large organizations. It should be a free information and communication technology (ICT) application.

Each year we watched the training industry go down this traditional one-way, trickle down, colonial strategic path (see Figure 2). Only the largest of organizations can afford traditional e-learning programs, and that is a major hurdle in itself. We tell schools that Moodle and open code are free until the hosting company sends the school a bill for fifty thousands dollars, not to mention the additional IT staff that is needed.

4. How to Go to Global Collaboration
To fix these issues, we have to connect three dots together: filter out Internet garbage, collaborate a simple way to build

short lessons that anyone can do without training (or authoring tools), and provide intuitive library portals that citizens can use to search and explore safely.
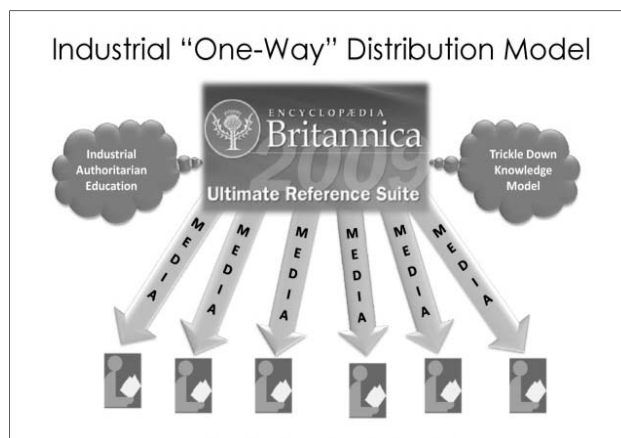

Figure 2. Colonial Content

To truly go global also would mean the end of the silo LMS as the primary container of knowledge and figuring out how to grab only safe content from the millions of places scattered around the world. Knowledge is no longer in the school (server silo) but "Out There Content" somewhere on the globe (see Figure 3).
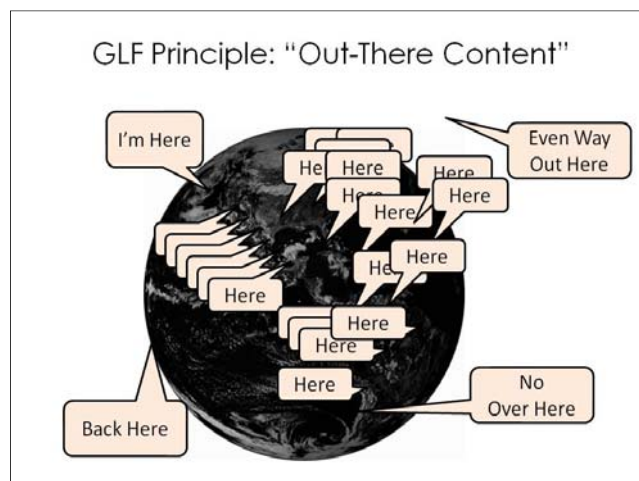

Figure 3. Global Learning Framework

This knowledge distribution strategy has to be integrated with a collaborative community (like Ning). With these tools integrated, we can place it in an ICT with global, massive scalable results at the local level. This is what we call the Global Learning Framework. A field teacher in a cyber café or library in Kenya's Rift Valley needs to be able to build an AIDs play for Kitale, Kenya, with the rhythm and dance of Africa. Let the slums of Kenya share the lessons with the slums of India; that is democratic learning (see Figure 4).

To some, these ideas may seem a bit radical. However, this system is called a Web Education System™ and was
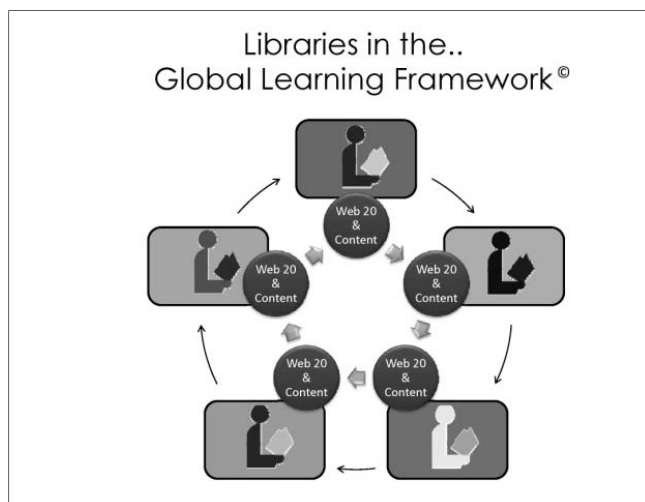
Figure 4. Global collaborative local publishing libraries

developed by Bascom years ago under the brand Global Chalkboard™.

5. Hoarding Knowledge

Another strategic clash between a Global Learning Framework and typical organizational e-learning programs is our tendency to hoard knowledge and claim ownership for the results. Yet hoarding knowledge actually kills children the same way hoarding feudal kings did hundreds of years ago. What is the real difference between a castle wall and a server registration wall?

It is open collaboration that makes knowledge relevant and useful to the democratic society. In addition, open code should not be confused with open collaboration or open societies. Moodle is just another knowledge base educational silo, even if the code is open.

6. The Practice of Educational Tribalism

I was having dinner with teachers in mud houses in the slums of Kitale, Kenya, and it occurred to me that perhaps we are practicing academic tribalism and that the results were, in a way, just as deadly as angry young men in pickup trucks. We would not dream of holding back food. Yet, we are willing to hold back knowledge for organizational gain or grants when it should be free. In addition, we do not trust these wonderful, bright teachers in front of us with this collaborative technology. I find this to be exceedingly sad. How come African teachers are not building these courses? To think they cannot build these courses is the same intellectual, tribal arrogance today as colonialism was for Africa years ago.

7. Empowering Democratic Learning

We have an opportunity with the Global Learning Framework to provide a way for Africa and the world to collaboratively teach their communities. They can do it, because the U.S. did it 200 years ago. Jefferson built U.S. country fairs for collaborative education. All we need to do is provide a way to eliminate the operational and financial barriers of e-learning the same way the Web is doing with K-12 now. E-learning is preaching indexed textbook knowledge to a generation that is collaborative and relational by nature.

America's massive success over England's colonialism came about because every day people collaborated together to build a new world. It works. Democracy in education trusts that the people's collective knowledge can build something far superior than any one elite person or group can. Even leading management books, such as *Good to Great*, point out this very humbling principle. Our current distance learning strategies fight the principle of democracy and education with top-down educational technology and business strategies. It is academic tribalism.

Additional Information

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Why a Global Learning Framework™

We developed the Global Learning Framework (http://globallearningframework.ning.com) because three life altering things happened. First, I went to Africa, and it both broke my heart and I fell in love with the brilliance of the global poor. Second, Web 2.0 came on the scene and proved Dewey's theories were right on target. Third, I discovered last year a company that managed to put all the pieces together and encouraged me to put this in writing, Bascom.

Global Learning Framework is a trademark of Richard C. Close. You will find the root of these ideas by exploring Wikipedia on John Dewey, Constructivism and Singularity.

Author Information

Richard Close, CEO, Chrysalis Campaign, has provided over two decades of learning strategy and marketing for organizations ranging from IBM and Microsoft, e-learning vendors, U.S. public schools, and poverty programs. He is an International speaker, author, photographer, Ning Creator, and e-learning developer. He is the author of the Global Learning Framework™ and is currently examining the building of Global Learning Community Centers™ in Africa and the U.S.

The profits that Chrysalis Campaign receives from papers, books, and gallery events help poverty programs in Kenya, Zambia, and U.S. urban poor. Chrysalis is applying for NGO not-for-profit status.

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